

"Remembering my friend"

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by, Matthew

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My best friend Sergeant (Phoenix)
Ryan Robinson wanted to be an Army Ranger more than anything in the world. These United States soldiers must be ready to fight anywhere at anytime in the world.

During training, they fight imaginary enemies in jungles, mountains, and deserts. I remember receiving a phone call prior to the nine weeks of basic training from Ryan. He knew the training was going to be very intense and hard. I remember at one point in the conversation he said, "I know I am going to be pushed to my limit". But in February of 1995, Ryan Robinson began a test in a Florida swamp that would be more than difficult. It would be deadly.

Ryan was 28 years old. He was the oldest trainee in his Ranger class. He was strong and fit. He believed he could pass all the tough tests his instructors gave him.

During the first part of the training, the soldiers were tested for mountain and desert fighting. By the end of those eight weeks, the

trainees and my buddy Ryan were worn out. Many had lost 20 or 30 pounds. In fact, two-thirds of the 334 men had dropped out or had failed a test. Ryan was one of 102 men still in the program.

For those 102 soldiers, the last week of training would be in the swamp for the jungle test.

During that time, the soldiers would spend a lot of time in very cold water.

Sergeant Robinson knew that cold water pulls heat from a person's body. He worried about getting hypothermia. As Ryan had been trained in the past he knew a bad case of hypothermia can be very deadly.

The jungle test began on the Yellow River in the Florida Panhandle. The men were divided into three groups. These were called Company A, Company B, and Company C. Ryan was part of Company B.

At noon on February 15, 1995, the trainees and their instructors climbed into rubber rafts. The three groups headed down the river.

The water was only 52 degrees.

There was another danger, as well. Heavy rains had occurred in the northern part of the state of Florida. The river was beginning to flood. No one in the group knew it, though. The floodwaters hadn't reached them yet. Again not even the instructors knew of the flood.

As the men floated down the river, they realized the water was rising. Company A's instructors sensed that it was too risky to continue ahead. They told their men to head for dry land. They would take a land route. Company B and Company C, however, headed farther down the river. They plunged into Crane Branch Swamp. They did not know that the waters of the swamp were dangerously high.

Tall, twisted trees rose more than 100 feet on all sides of the swamp. The air was heavy and moist.

Soon, the two groups found dry land and left their rafts. But after walking many yards, they reached water again.

Because they were still being tested, the trainees waded into the water. Ryana was really surprised by how deep the water was. It was only supposed to reach up to his ankles. Instead, the cold water came up to his waist. Ryana and his fellow trainees banged their knees on tree stumps hidden in the water. They tripped over sunken roots. All that was bad enough. Then the cold water began to rise. It rose to their chests. Then it rose to their necks. The men put on life jackets and beyond. The men drowned. Ryan had to swim to keep from drowning. Ryan had to swim from tree to tree. As the sun set, some of the men including Ryan began to shiver. Ryan knew it was a sign of hypothermia. Until that point, the trainees had made their own decisions. But now the teachers were worried about the men's safety. So they took over. One trainee would cover the deep water. One trainee would have to swim to the far side with the rope and tie it to a tree.

Then one by one, the other trainees would move across the bridge.

Ryan volunteered to be the last person in line. So Ryan stayed in the deep water, helping each man hook his safety line to the rope bridge. As he worked, he talked to himself. The men heard him saying "Is it cold? Yeah it's cold. Are you shivering? Oh, yea I'm shivering." Other men were shivering too. Three of those men would soon die from hypothermia.

At last, only Ryan was left in the water. He untied the rope. The other soldiers pulled him across. They tried to get to dry land. By then, though, Robinson was suffering from severe hypothermia. His buddies tried to help him. But there was nothing they could do. By the time a helicopter arrived to rescue the soldiers, Sergeant Ryan Robinson was dead. His brave actions had helped save many lives.

Veterans Day is one of my favorite holiday's to celebrate, because it gives me a chance to remember one of our nations unknown hero's Mr. Sergeant Ryan Robinson.